

Yule Shoot Your Eye Out by eternalgoldfish

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Summary:

Steve moves to Indianapolis to avoid Hawkins, but Billy doesn't get the memo. Now it's Christmas, they're snowed in at work, and Steve is giving up on holidays.

Merry Christmas, I could care less.

Yule Shoot Your Eye Out

Author's Note:

I know it's after Christmas and this isn't really edited,
I suck, okay?
"Yule Shoot Your Eye Out" is the most accurate Fall
Out Boy song ever, honestly.

It's December the 24th and Steve is lying on his back under the belly of a sluggish Oldsmobile, trying to figure out why the whole beast rattles when it's put in reverse. He's been kicking around Indianapolis for the better part six months, having spent the six before that kicking around Hawkins as a displaced graduate with too much time on his hands and not enough potential.

In Indianapolis he's still short on potential, but he's found how to keep his hands busy. It still isn't clear how his botched auto class in the tenth grade translated to him being hired to do oil changes, but he's taking the days as they come, learning what this or that piece of metal is for while wiping grime onto old designer jeans.

His mom and dad had wanted him to join his dad's company when he graduated, but Steve couldn't, not after all the planning he'd done in his head when he was dating Nancy. Not after she broke his heart and demodogs lurched from the earth all in one gory November.

Steve's parents hadn't understood why he couldn't take the cushy job they offered, but they'd helped him pack when he decided that a change of scenery might settle the twist in his gut.

His gut is still twisted, but he's got his own place and a bit of hope, and that's something.

Working in the autoshop is good. A year ago, Steve never would have guessed he'd enjoy rolling under a dark machine and breathing in skunky grease fumes, but now it's as familiar and natural as waking up in a warm bed with sleep in his eyes and his bat resting serenely on the other pillow.

Perhaps natural is the wrong word, but his mornings have been ritual for nearly two years, and as Steve fiddles with a hunk of metal under the car --damn, what is that piece of metal called?-- he thinks about how long it's been since he felt this secure on his own.

He definitely hadn't last Christmas. Then, he was still spinning his wheels in Hawkins, jumping at shadows and pulling out his hair. His father left for a business trip halfway through carving the ham and his relatives had way too many questions. What were his plans for the future? When was he going to start dating again? Why was he spending so much time with fourteen year olds? Did he get into college?

Steve drops a wrench and groans. This year, his dad is going to stick around. The ham will be on the table by seven. Aunt Souse will be drunk and tugging on his cheeks by eight, and Mom will ply him with another pair of overpriced jeans by eleven. It'll be a perfect Christmas.

First, he just has to finish finding whatever the fuck is wrong with this stupid car.

The shop door slams open, followed by a sharp gust and the stomping of feet. Steve is about to come out, wonders who the hell would be here at six thirty on Christmas eve when the shop is closed, when a heavy, slush covered boot kicks the end of his creeper.

"Harrington," Billy says, slapping his hands on the hood of the car. From the sounds of it, he's already been into some spirits, and none of them were Christmas specific.

"What the hell, Hargrove?"

Of all the ghosts to follow Steve to Indianapolis, one of them just had to be Billy. Apparently, and Steve only understood this through rumours, Billy had moved away from Hawkins the second his graduation certificate hit his Camaro's dashboard. Max had mentioned Billy had left, but forgot the part where he showed up an hour away with his car, a pack of cigarettes and some bruised ribs, and miraculously didn't get murdered by the first person his smart mouth offended.

She also hadn't mentioned that Billy would become a mechanic, or that over the span of the next year he would be hired and fired by three different shops. But Max wasn't a mind reader, that was more El's division, so Steve had tried to be only mildly bitter when Billy had rolled in three months ago looking for work. Billy, being the charming asshole that he was, was hired immediately.

"Sonovabitch, what're you doing here?" Billy slams his hands on the hood again. "Mommy and daddy forget to invite you to Christmas?"

"Shut up," Steve jerks out from under the car and hops off the creeper. "I'm leaving in like, ten minutes, fuck off."

Billy shakes his head, tongue clicking. "Good luck with that. It's shitting snow out there."

"So I'll be a bit late," Steve says. He wipes his hands on a cloth and chucks it on top of his tool cart.

Billy watches Steve move around the shop, hands still braced on the Oldsmobile and mouth slightly open. "We're stuck here, dude. I couldn't dig my girl out of the snow. No way your rust bucket's got four wheel drive."

It's now that Steve notices the brown bag clutched in Billy's left hand and the snow caked into his curls. His cheeks are chapped a shiny red and when he turns his head, Steve can just make out flecks of ice in his eyelashes.

"You still got a shovel?"

Billy rolls his eyes and takes a slug from the bottle in his bag. "It's propped behind the door. Merry Christmas."

"Back so soon?" Billy calls.

He's got the door to a rusty impala hanging open and his feet kicked up on the dash, his whiskey hanging loose from the arm he's got draped across the back. The brown bag is crumpled under the Oldsmobile.

“Fucking fuck.” Steve smashes the shovel into the floor.

“Christmas is ruined!” Billy laughs.

Steve flips him off. He drops his hat and gloves and fights with his jacket as he moves through the garage to the glass door into the shop proper. The lights in the front area are already off for the evening. Archie, the receptionist, has hung every inch of window with garish tinsel and twinkling lights, and by the time Steve makes his way to the telephone his heart aches for the lights Joyce Byers gave him two years ago, the same lights strung in his apartment now.

The phone only rings twice before his mother’s voice squeaks down the line.

“I’m okay, mom. I promise,” Steve insists. “The storm is too rough for me to get out now. I’m going to try again in a few hours.”

But he doubts the snow will clear enough by then. Even without the new snow falling, the snow already on the ground is too deep to drive on and Steve can’t exactly dig his way to Hawkins.

“Just stay safe,” his mother fusses. “Where are you? Are you at home?”

“I’m at the shop. I was going to leave straight from here.”

His mother makes a noise. “Do you have food? Is there anyone else there?”

Steve thinks about telling her about Billy, then immediately doesn’t. “There’s one guy. Between the stuff in the car and the break room I think we should be alright.”

Mom sighs over the line. “Alright. We’ll save you some fruitcake.”

Billy steals the tiny Christmas tree from the front desk when Steve isn’t looking and sets it up in the break room, filling up the space left on the end table below it with mismatched pop cans, unopened candy bars, and two more mysterious brown bags. The tiny lights cast

a red glow on every inch of the room, from the splitting leather couch pressed against the end table all the way to the cramped kitchenette on the other side of the dining table. He doesn't bother with the overhead lights.

"Hey, Harrington," Billy calls. "Get your ass in here or I'm eating all the food."

The lukewarm pizza from yesterday's staff party is hardly a delicacy, but Steve supposes it's better than trying to cook frozen potatoes in the microwave. They've pulled everything they can from their cars, including blankets, mostly frozen food, lighters, and Steve's overly packed duffle bag. He pulls on a clean sweater in between bites of pizza. At least they've still got power.

"Where's your bag?" Steve asks.

"My bag?"

"Yeah, your stuff for going home."

Billy blinks at him before taking a sip of pop. His curls bounce and he licks the foam from his upper lip before he says, "I live around the corner. I don't need a bag."

It's Steve's turn to blink. "You weren't going home for Christmas?"

Billy's lip curls. He stands, slaps his pizza back on his paper plate, and grabs a pack of cigarettes before slamming the door to the garage behind him.

A while later, Steve sits behind the reception desk with half a bottle of wine poured into an empty McDonalds cup. He sips the wine and twists the chair with his toes, watching the way the lights catch in the corner of his eye before shooting across his vision.

He's not sure how long Billy has been gone. Maybe he went out into the snow and died. It would be pretty shitty. People would probably think Steve did it. But between the wind shaking the front door and the look on Billy's face when he left, Steve isn't about to start a

search mission. Either Billy comes back or he doesn't.

"This is my Christmas," Billy says when he comes back. He smells like cigarettes but his hands are warm when he takes Steve's cup to steal a gulp.

"Jesus," he makes a face. "Why are you drinking wine like that?"

Steve slowly twists in his seat. "Don't judge me." He steals the cup back and takes a sip.

Billy flops down on the carpet and runs a hand through his hair. "Whatever. I was just saying—I wasn't going to Hawkins. I don't have a bag. Don't ask."

After all the shit with the government, Steve is pretty good at not telling, so he's pretty sure he can handle some not asking as well. Especially when he doesn't care.

"Where'd you go?"

"Bathroom."

Steve points with his straw. "Ron's going to kill you."

"Ron can shove it. He smokes in there all the damn time."

After a few more twists, Steve sighs and lurches out of his chair. Billy follows him to the stereo in the kitchenette and watches, brows knit, as Steve fumbles through the stack of heavily used cassettes tucked behind the coffee maker. There's this classic Christmas album Steve's heard a few times over the last few weeks, between Billy hiding it and Ron finding it, and Steve knows which one it is from the way Billy groans.

"You can't bitch," Steve insists as he pushes it into the stereo. "It's Christmas. If I can't have turkey, I'm going to have Frank Sinatra."

"I should've chucked that into the snow," Billy complains, but he doesn't fight. He grabs the open bottle of whiskey off the table and

spreads out along the couch. Steve takes his cup and sits at the other end.

If Steve closes his eyes and breathes slowly, he can remember being six and short for his age, dazzled by the lights on his family's Christmas tree and determined he could reach the star if he climbed enough ladder rungs. He remembers lying under the tree and looking up through all the layers like an astronomer searching the cosmos. But that creative flare is gone, and he misses winters filled with laughter at lights instead of shaky bones. He's left Hawkins, but reminders of the Upside Down still creep into Indianapolis. Maybe it's the same for Billy.

"Is this the cheesy part where we're supposed to dance?" Billy draws.

Steve opens his eyes and scrunches his nose. "God, no. Ugh. I'm not that bored."

"Good," Billy stretches. "Because it's sure as shit not happening."

"What, you don't want to do a little waltz with me? It could be very romantic."

Billy lunges and shoves Steve, not hard enough to push him off the couch, but hard enough that his cup tips to the ground as Billy leans over him, teeth bared and squinting. For a second too long, Steve almost thinks he likes it.

Then time snaps back. Billy gives Steve another hard shove into the armrest before flopping back down. "That's not fucking funny. I'm not like that."

Steve raises his hands in don't-shoot. "Okay, okay," he says, "It was just a joke, Jesus."

Billy huffs and looks at the snow whirling around outside the window. Steve picks the cup, which was luckily empty, and steps over to the counter to refill it. He leans with his back to the wall and his hands clutching his wine.

"I didn't mean to imply anything," Steve offers.

“Don’t,” Billy replies.

And well, Steve can do that.

Around eleven, the electricity goes. The whirring in the building stops all at once, replaced with nothing but the rushing wind outside. The only light that remains comes from the tiny Christmas tree in the corner, running on batteries, and isn’t that the most cliché thing Steve’s ever witnessed.

“Fucking great,” Billy groans.

Steve sighs and rolls out the emergency sleeping bag he keeps in his car. “I saw some flashlights in the cupboard above the microwave, if you need to shit.”

Neither of them has been outside in hours, but judging by the frost on the windows, it looks like they’re going to be in for a chilly night. Steve puts sweatpants over his pyjama pants and loads on another sweater, before pausing over his duffle bag to look at Billy. Billy, being Billy, just has his stupid, too-thin leather jacket over one of the ridiculous button up shirts he keeps in his locker. Somehow, the universe always has a way of making Steve look like the asshole in the room.

Steve whips his spare sweater at Billy’s head and says, “Wear it.”

“What the fuck,” Billy growls, but shucks his jacket to pull the sweater on anyway. It’s one of the soft, warm ones Steve’s mom brings with her when she visits.

Unlike Steve, Billy is always unprepared for Indiana winters. In high school, Steve constantly overheard Billy bitching about the weather, from how freezing it was to how fucking pale he got when the sunny months were colder than Satan’s dick. Now, Steve gets to listen to Billy whine about the same problems to older men who care significantly less. But Billy never complains to Steve. They’re the youngest guys in the shop, but this is the most they’ve spoken in months. Steve thinks it might have something to do with a broken

face and a baseball bat.

"I'm going to bed," Steve says as he slides into his nest on the floor.

"Yeah, whatever."

"Billy, why are you here?" Steve asks half an hour later, once Billy is curled up with a thin blanket on the couch. From where Steve lies half a foot away on the floor, he can just make out the Christmas lights bouncing off the back of Billy's hair.

"I work here."

"Yeah, but you weren't in the shop today."

Bully huffs. "I wasn't fixing anything today. I was in the office."

"Doing what? Why?"

"The books."

"Books?"

"Yeah, all the accounting crap. Archie's shit at it. He gave it to me to do weeks ago." Billy shrugs, but doesn't turn to face Steve. "I took accounting senior year. It's whatever."

"I didn't know you were good at math."

"Some of us didn't scrape by with Cs in high school."

"Shut up."

"You asked."

"I thought you were aiming for a basketball scholarship."

"I love basketball. I wasn't aiming for anything." Billy quiets. "Wasn't sure I'd last that long."

"I'm sorry?"

“Nothing. Shut up. Merry Christmas. Go to sleep.”

Steve stares at Billy’s back and thinks of Hawkins and high school. After that rough November, he’d nearly quit basketball. He’d nearly quit everything. But Billy had gotten more intense. Their team won more, even as Steve spent more time on the bench. Billy was seen with more busted lips. Stories about keg stands and house party brawls and the number of girls Billy had supposedly hooked up with made it to Steve’s ears even though he’d stopped leaving his house.

Maybe Steve missed a lot of things.

“Merry Christmas,” Steve says softly.

Billy finally rolls to see Steve. It’s a million degrees below in the break room. Steve doesn’t know how long they’ve been trying to sleep, but it feels like a decade of time has passed with them both breathing slow, huffing and shuffling with their eyes squeezed shut.

“I’m sorry,” Billy says.

“It’s a Christmas miracle.”

“Shut up, I’m trying to do nice shit.”

Steve cracks a weak smile. “What, you want me to believe your heart’s grown three sizes in this cold?”

“I don’t know what that means.”

“Dr. Suess. Your dad never read you Dr. Suess?”

“My dad never read me anything,” Billy says through grit teeth.

Steve thinks on that a moment. “Shit. Sorry.”

Billy takes a deep breath and closes his eyes. The light dances on his eyelashes. “We didn’t do Christmas before Susan and Max. And that was just once. And it was shit. So this was—will you stop moving—this was nice.”

When Billy opens his eyes Steve is sitting, heart in his mouth.
“Billy--”

“Fuck you, don’t look at me like that.”

But Steve doesn’t know what look he’s wearing. He shuffles closer on his knees, one hand outstretched a moment, before he drops it on the cushion next to Billy’s face, lets his index finger brush Billy’s cheekbone where it meets the couch. “This is the wine,” he insists, “And the whiskey,” before bending to kiss Billy’s forehead.

After a frozen pause, Billy pushes Steve back with a firm hand on his chest. “Go to sleep,” he says.

The heat whirs back on and then off. Billy shuffles on the couch before sighing and dropping to the floor. Steve hears the sleeping bag unzip before he’s got a back plastered in Billy and stubble scratching his ear.

“You tell anyone and I’ll drop a Ford on you.”

“You couldn’t kill me with a nicer car?”

“The shitty car makes your death even more pathetic.”

Billy’s hands are chilly, but the one looped around Steve’s waist and tucked against his bare abdomen isn’t for warmth. Steve takes a shaky breath, knows what the tightness in his chest means, and wiggles to face Billy for the first real time all night. They’re the same height, more or less, but Billy’s lying with his head pillowed higher on Steve’s rolled up jacket, and Steve has to tilt his head back to avoid smashing his nose into Billy’s pointy chin.

“Whiskey?” he asks softly.

“Something like that.”

Objectively, Billy’s always been handsome. Steve knows it, knows it’s struck him off guard before. But in this light, Billy’s personality is less harsh. His breath is a horrible blend of sleep, pizza and whiskey,

strong enough that it wrinkles Steve's nose, and Billy's mouth looks soft and quiet. He's pretty, without crassness pushing Steve away.

Steve's still going to claim it's the wine, or the whiskey, or the spirit of Christmas, but he presses up and kisses Billy's chin and doesn't stop when Billy bends to kiss him back.

In the morning, Steve wakes to Billy sitting on a dining chair with one foot on the seat while he munches one of the candy bars. The snow hasn't stopped, but the sun breaks through the window for a moment, just long enough for Steve to realize the overhead lights are on and he's too hot in his layers.

"I think the snowplows are out," Billy says. "You might want to call your mom."

Steve scrambles to his feet and nods, before peeling off one of his sweaters and running a hand through his hair. He stands there a moment, clutching the fabric. "Do you want to come?" he asks, and feels a hot flush of stupidity.

"No."

Billy grabs his cigarettes and heads for the garage. This time, when he comes back in, his fingers are freezing as he takes the phone from Steve to place it back in the cradle.

"All packed?"

"Yeah, I told my mom I'd be on the road in a few minutes."

Billy nods and sticks his hands into his pockets. "I dug out the cars. Before you got up. You snore."

"Shut up, I do not."

"You do," Billy insists.

"Fuck you." Steve shoves Billy's shoulder. Billy catches his hand.

“You’d want to,” he hisses, his face mean, but his hold on Steve’s hand loose.

“Maybe,” Steve says slowly. He takes Billy in with wide eyes, thinks about telling his mom who he was spending the night with, immediately decides not to.

When Steve kisses Billy’s cheek as he says goodbye, Billy doesn’t punch him in the mouth.

“Yeah, yeah, fuck off to Hawinks.”